



City of Seattle

Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

SEATTLE PLANNING COMMISSION

JANUARY 26, 2006

Approved Meeting Minutes

Commissioners in Attendance

Steve Sheehy – Chair, Jerry Finrow – Vice-Chair, Hilda Blanco, George Blomberg, Mahlon Clements, Tom Eanes, Chris Fiori, Martin Kaplan, Valerie Kinast, Mimi Sheridan, Tony To

Commissioners Absent

Lyn Krizanich, Joe Quintana, Carl See

Commission Staff

Barbara Wilson – Director, Scott Dvorak – Planning Analyst, Robin Magonegil – Administrative Assistant

Guests

Gary Johnson – DPD

Please Note: Seattle Planning Commission meeting minutes are not an exact transcript but instead represent key points and the basis of the discussion.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 am by Chair Steve Sheehy.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

- December 8, 2005 Minutes Approval

ACTION: Commissioner Mimi Sheridan moves that the December 8, 2005 minutes be approved. Vice-Chair Jerry Finrow seconds the approval. The motion passes unanimously.

- January 12, 2006 Minutes Approval

ACTION: Vice-Chair Finrow moves that the January 12, 2006 minutes be approved. Commissioner Martin Kaplan seconds the approval. The motion passes unanimously.

- Chair's Report & Events

Chair Sheehy reviewed upcoming meetings and events specifically noting the Waterfront Open House on February 1st. Director Barbara Wilson called attention to several other meetings in January.

COMMISSION REVIEW

▪ SPC Draft letter South East Seattle Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit

Chair Sheehy asked if any of the Commissioners felt they had a conflict of interest and needed to disclose that or to recuse themselves. Commissioner Tony To disclosed that he has professional interests in Southeast Seattle but does not personally own property there. The organization that he works for does, however, own some commercial property in the area.

Chair Sheehy noted that he does not see a conflict as Commissioner To does not personally stand to gain financially but thanked him for disclosing for the record. Vice Chair Finrow concurred that he also feels there is no conflict of interest.

Commissioner Tom Eanes explained the background of this letter. He noted that this letter is a culmination of work that the Commission had done previously. Vice Chair Finrow asked whether Council member and UDP Chair Peter Steinbrueck had been contacted concerning the Commission's proposed letter. Ms. Wilson replied that his office had been contacted and that she had spoken to one of his staff members and had asked about timing of delivering the letter. She reported that Steinbrueck's staff responded that this topic is not be one of the first items on their agenda and would most likely come up in the second quarter of 2006. Commissioner Hilda Blanco asked who would develop the pre-approved standard plans that are mentioned as part of the technical guide and suggested that this would be a great project for some University of Washington students. Vice Chair Finrow noted that the Santa Cruz, California DADU design program is outstanding and would provide a good model for Seattle. Chair Sheehy mentioned that he had made a number of edits to the letter. In addition, he felt that the letter should emphasize that the Commission has been on record of being supportive of DADUs city-wide for quite some time and that while we still believe that a city-wide proposal makes sense, the current proposal is a critical first step that we support. He added that the Commission needs to be really clear about intent and involvement.

ACTION: Vice-Chair Finrow moved to approve the letter as edited and send it to the Executive Committee to finalize. Commissioner Blanco seconded. The Planning Commission unanimously approved the letter and will send it to the UDP at the appropriate time.

▪ SPC Review of Viaduct Planning Efforts

Chair Sheehy asked if any of the Commissioners felt they had a conflict of interest and needed to disclose that or to recuse themselves. Commissioner Mimi Sheridan noted that she has a contract working with the Viaduct project preparing the historic resources portion of the EIS. She recused herself from the discussion.

Commissioner Eanes noted that there are two over-riding issues - public safety and economic damage. He added that SDOT recently briefed the Land Use and Transportation Committee and he provided a recap of that meeting.

Commissioner Mahlon Clements questioned if there is or isn't a decision to be made at this point by the state legislature. He stated that it is not clear to him what the decision process is for this project moving forward. He noted that there seems to be potential for opposition to the preferred alternative by the state legislature. Commissioner Eanes noted that they had asked Steve Pearce of SDOT what

the framework was for the decision from his perspective. Commissioner Eanes said they were told it was up to the Governor and the legislature and that SDOT was hoping for a decision by the end of this legislative session. Commissioner Clements noted that the danger is that there are particular legislators that may find a way to stop this as they don't like the alternative.

Scott Dvorak added that the City's official position is that they want a tunnel and are planning for one but to keep in mind that it is ultimately WSDOT's project. Commissioner Clements asked who the letter should be addressed to and whether it should go to Seattle's state legislators. Chair Sheehy stated we may need to do more research to confirm the timeline with SDOT and WSDOT. Commissioner Eanes feels that it's not clear in the City that this is decided and that it seems to remain an open question. He noted that there were several things in last week's presentation that were different than he had heard before. One was that the committed and anticipated funding totaled nearly \$3.5 billion and is essentially in place at this point.

Vice-Chair Finrow stated that he believed that part of this letter was to address what the City is doing on the waterfront. He feels that the focus of this letter should set design issues aside but that these issues would bring them front and center. He felt that the Commission would do well to advocate solving the public safety problem. Commissioner Clements noted that if we put forward that the most important issues are public safety and economic damage then we may be endorsing the quickest, least expensive solution. By taking this position, the Commission may inadvertently promote the rebuild option rather than the tunnel – and that may not be something we want to do since our previous position supports the tunnel option. He stated that he felt it was important to reiterate the Planning Commissions support for the tunnel as the preferred option from a planning and urban design perspective and also state that the core project funding along with the continued concerns associated with public safety and welfare require that those with the power to make a decision should do so and should act swiftly.

It was suggested that the Commission check on the protocol for communicating with the state legislature and decide if this letter would go to the Governor or if it should be addressed to the appropriate chairs in the State Legislature.

Commissioner To noted that if the intent of the letter is to simply encourage the Governor to make a decision then it is sort of a mute point as the Governor is already aware that a decision has to be made; but if we are trying to get a particular decision made then that is something else. He added that if we are trying to change and maintain our position then there might be a different strategy.

Chair Sheehy brought the topic to closure and called for a motion.

ACTION: Commissioner Martin Kaplan moved to approve a letter to be sent from the Seattle Planning Commission to the State of Washington to reiterate the Planning Commission's continued support of the tunnel option and that based on the current financial information regarding the financial feasibility of the core project, along with our continued concerns about public safety and welfare we urge the State to move forward with the preferred alternative. He further moved that the Executive Committee edit the letter, add a paragraph that strongly endorses our previous position and email it to the full Commission for review and final approval. Vice-Chair Finrow seconded. The Planning Commission approved the letter with Commissioner Blanco opposing and Commissioner Sheridan recusing herself from the vote.

Vice-Chair Finrow noted that the City, City Design and many in the design community are strong advocates for the tunnel project, but if the tunnel is not built and there is a surface or elevated solution he hopes that the design community does not abandon the Waterfront.

▪ **Ethics Management Plan**

Executive Director Wilson reminded the Commission that they had appointed an Ethics Management Plan task force - Commissioners Blomberg, Fiori, Finrow and Kaplan. She noted that the task force has identified some of the major issues to make our procedures and policies operate more smoothly. She asked that the Commissioners review the draft ethics management plan and we will discuss it at the next full commission meeting. She added that both fronts are moving forward in terms of resolving the current situation regarding the September 7th ruling by the Seattle Ethics and Elections Committee (SEEC) – legislation is moving forward, and a letter is being prepared to request advisory opinions from SEEC. As for the education period that is set to expire on February 1, 2006, a letter will be submitted to SEEC requesting a continuation on the education. She noted that SEEC will review the request next week at their meeting. She does not see why they would not extend that.

Commissioner Clements asked if there is a schedule for legislation or finality to this situation. Ms. Wilson responded that there was but that the Mayor's office is deciding on whether they should wait for the advisory opinions from SEEC as that would tell them whether there is a problem and, if so, exactly what the problem is. By knowing this information, they will have a better idea on how to craft the legislation to more specifically address real problems. The question for SEEC is how quickly they can get back to us on our questions and scenarios. She added that there isn't clarity on how Seattle Municipal Code 416 would apply to the Planning Commission. She feels there will be legislation even if it is simply getting rid of financial penalties for advisory bodies, but right now it is a matter of whether we want to wait for SEEC to rule on our advisory stuff or the Mayor sends legislation to Council. Once it gets to Council the Commission will have to commit to educating Council on the

Commissioner Clements asked if the reason that some of the Commissioners who have been absent has been officially expressed as due to this ethics problem. Ms. Wilson responded that not officially but yes, she feels they have been absent because of the ethics problem. Vice-Chair Finrow expressed that the key issues for the Commission are the fines, the 12 month prohibitive conduct rule, and the appearance of conflict question. He continued that we have to hang in there until we get this resolved. Chair Sheehy added that we are continuing to look for others to join our coalition and that we have been clear that this is not our problem but the City's. He continued that if SEEC declines our request to extend the moratorium then that would be a problem.

COMMISSION BRIEFING

▪ **Center City Strategy Update**

Gary Johnson of the Department of Planning and Development was introduced to provide a briefing on his work as the Center City Strategy coordinator.

Mr. Johnson began by saying that he could not resist providing his unsolicited comment to the Commission's earlier conversation that he is a supporter of the tunnel option. He added that if the City does not go with that option then that would be one of the greatest blunders of our generation.

Mr. Johnson stated that the Center City concept is a vision about how anticipated substantial future population growth in this region provides us an opportunity to create great walkable, vibrant neighborhoods in the urban core. He noted that we have choices to make to accommodate that growth. He added that we are starting from a great place.

Mr. Johnson noted that he started working on a framework document. He also mentioned that he met with Commissioner Lyn Krizanich and asked her about identifying things they are missing – things that current projects might not be addressing but that shouldn't be overlooked.

Mr. Johnson then reported on what he had done in 2005. He noted that they were working with a consultant on overall strategy issues and that the next phase was to create documents and neighborhood profiles. They haven't been happy with that work and have decided to spend their energies and resources elsewhere. He added that they were recently approached by a local firm that offered to do some work pro bono along these lines.

He addressed the Commission's question on whether this is a strategy or an action agenda by noting that it is a little of both. He described the South Downtown process and his work making sure it that process is considering its role in achieving the Center City goals. He expressed that this has been very rewarding work and was a sort of a crash test for him on Seattle's land use policy.

He noted that he has been acting as the City's lead on the North Lot development and that we are seeing great progress on this. He mentioned that there is an exciting proposal to lid the railroad tracks from King Street Station to Royal Brougham and that because of the scale of these projects they will require attention to make sure that they work. Vice-Chair Finrow asked if those proposals were on-line somewhere. Mr. Johnson replied that they were not, as far as he knew. In terms of the North Lot, he noted that King County hopes to have legislation to City Council by July.

He stated that he has also been heavily involved in a number of quality of life initiatives. An example of this is the issue of resident conflicts with nightclubs. The City seems to not have many tools to deal with managing night time entertainment. He added that there are finally some initiatives that will address this, including the alcohol impact area initiative.

Mr. Johnson ran through a list of some of the other projects that he has been working on including; Downtown Height and Density, South Lake Union, two city parks (one in Denny triangle and the other in South Downtown), working with SDOT and City Design on street improvement projects and some public outreach on Center City Strategy and the specific initiatives.

He noted that they have been talking with Larry Frank of University of British Columbia to discuss possibilities of some analysis of Center City to look at connections to help them as they do planning work.

Mr. Johnson then gave the details of his 2006 work plan. One major focus for center City efforts will be the Mayor's impact fee on new construction to fund park and open space. Legislation will go to Council soon. Related to that is the need to do open space planning. They feel that it is critical to merge park planning with the Blue Ring concept.

Mr. Johnson mentioned that he is also working on "family friendly amenities". He noted that if the Center City Strategy is to be effective at limiting sprawl then we need to talk about attracting families downtown. He stated that some people feel that the urban core is not where families want to be and

that maybe we should acknowledge that and move on. But he feels that we would be missing a great opportunity if we don't take a serious look at how to craft the kind of environment that would be a great place for families to live. This could include opening a public school in area downtown neighborhood. Commissioner George Blomberg stated that he feels that the term "family friendly amenities" diminishes the importance of these structural pieces. He feels that there is a better way to phrase this to stress the importance of it.

Mr. Johnson expressed that when grading himself over the last year he is not happy that the framework isn't fleshed out more but that he is excited about projects coming together.

Commissioner To mentioned the roundtable that the Commission had on the Center City Strategy and asked about the connections to neighborhoods. The areas that were important to people are education, transportation and housing.

Commissioner Clements added that he would like to remind everyone of the idea of defining "downtown" by linkages and looking at the idea of Center City more broadly.

Commissioner Sheridan noted that there is big lesson from the Viaduct and other downtown issues in the city. When you look at people who live in other areas such as Ballard, Rainier Valley and White Center; they don't necessarily see or value downtown the way that many of us do. For example, with the viaduct they see it as their way to get through downtown; they are less moved by the idea of creating an open space along the waterfront. She feels that there needs to be some process to broaden the discussion of Center City and to bring in more people both in terms of getting their input in and in relating the importance of what goes on in the Center City to the other neighborhoods in the city.

Gary Johnson agreed and stated that he feels that they have not captured the imaginations of people outside of the greater downtown area.

Chair Sheehy thanked Mr. Johnson for his time.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Sheehy adjourned the meeting at 9:04 am.